



MARQUETTE  
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LAW SCHOOL

# Guide to Thank You Correspondence

Eckstein Hall, Suite 240  
1215 W. Michigan St.  
Milwaukee, WI 53233  
414.288.3313

[mulawcareers@marquette.edu](mailto:mulawcareers@marquette.edu)

# Guide to Thank You Correspondence

## Career Planning Center

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***An effective thank you correspondence is a concise, genuine statement of gratitude that is personalized to the interviewer and reaffirms your enthusiasm and qualifications for the position.***

### What They Say and When to Write Them

**I am someone you should remember.**

**I understand business etiquette.**

**I am professional.**

**I value you as a person.**

**I value the time/assistance you provided to me.**

A well-written thank you conveys the above messages quite compellingly, and as such, thank you letters assume a significant role in your job search activities.

Throughout your job

search, there are several contexts in which you will want to author and send a note of gratitude including the following:

- After a job interview, regardless of whether you are offered the position
- After an informational interview
- After someone recommends you to an employer or colleague
- After receiving a job offer, regardless if you intend to accept the position
- After an attorney participates in a panel discus-

sion for your law school organization

- After a professor/professional contact pens a letter of recommendation for you
- After a reference speaks favorably to an employer on your behalf
- Any other situation where an individual (which could include a classmate) assists with your job search ■

### Your Closing Statement

While the circumstances for which you will author a thank you vary, the most common situation is following a job interview.

After an interview, the thank you correspondence is your final opportunity to **market** yourself for a position and accordingly should be attended to with the same thoughtfulness and scrutiny as the construction of your cover letters and resumé.

An effective thank you correspondence is a concise, genuine statement of gratitude that is **personalized** to

the interviewer and **reaffirms** your **enthusiasm** and **qualifications** for the position.

Noting the before-mentioned bolded words, “**market, personalized, reaffirms, enthusiasm, and qualifications**” should alert you to the idea that a trite, impersonal statement of “thank you for your time” is not deemed an effective thank you.

Appreciate the thank you for its unique posture. It is the one component of your candidacy where you can incorporate the elements of

the position and the characteristics of a candidate **which the interviewer articulated as important during the interview** into a compelling statement as to why you should be offered the job.

Consider the thank you to be your “closing statement.” It will tie together the many pieces of evidence supporting your candidacy in a persuasive and meaningful way. ■

## *Dissecting a Thank You Letter*

The frustration in authoring thank you letters often comes from the task of saying, “Thanks for the interview and please PICK ME, PICK ME, because I desperately need a job” in a manner that is eloquent, enthusiastic, and free from despair.

As with all other job-related correspondence, thank you letters can not be generic form letters where you simply mail merge names and addresses. At the end of the process, most employers are committed to hiring the right person, not solely class rank statistics. Hiring the right person is

personal; therefore, each thank you must be personalized. It must reflect the tone, energy, and expectations of its recipient. Some thank you letters may be quite formal, while others may be more causal. What is important is that they are specific to the interviewer and always professional.

You absolutely can not send a form thank you to an individual with whom you had an informational interview. In the instance of an informational interview, a professional has given of his/

her/their time for *your* benefit. You are obligated to send to them a well-written personalized statement of gratitude.

Having stated that there is no “form” or “template” upon which you can rely, there are guidelines to follow with respect to constructing a thank you correspondence that are outlined below. ■

### PARAGRAPH 1: Remember Me?

Your first paragraph performs several functions, including:

- Refreshing the reader’s memory as to who you are by referencing the date, location, and function (*e.g.*, job interview, informational interview) of the meeting.
- Thanking the recipient for his/her/their time, information shared, payment of lunch, hospitality, contacts recommended, etc.
- Establishing your sincere interest in the employer if the thank you is in response to a job interview.

#### THE SALUTATION

Please note the variations on the salutations in the examples to the right. In a thank you following a job interview, your relationship with the recipient remains professional. Use a title such as Mr., Ms., Mx., or Atty. Also, the colon, which is the more formal punctuation and typically used in business correspondence, is a better choice than a comma. Conversely, following an informational interview, your connection with the recipient of the letter is likely more personal. In this instance, use of the individual’s first name and a comma *may* be appropriate. Decisions regarding how to address the individual and which punctuation to use will always be dictated by the circumstances of each unique situation. ■

#### **EXAMPLE 1<sup>st</sup> PARAGRAPH: THANK YOU FOLLOWING A *JOB INTERVIEW*.**

Dear Mr. Beyer:

I thoroughly enjoyed our meeting at your office on Thursday, March 19th regarding my interest in joining Beyer & Holder as a 2022 summer law clerk. Thank you for your time and your thoughtful responses to my questions about your firm. I left our meeting extremely impressed with you and your colleague, Atty. Marcus, and the firm’s strategic plan regarding expanding its practice to include a stronger labor law presence with local and national unions.

#### **What this paragraph does effectively:**

- It recalls the time and place of the meeting.
- It clarifies that you were interviewed for a summer position (keep in mind that large employers may be interviewing for several different positions at any given time).
- It makes a statement specific to the firm’s strategic plan, which indicates you put time and effort into creating a personalized statement of gratitude.

#### **EXAMPLE 1<sup>st</sup> PARAGRAPH: THANK YOU FOLLOWING AN *INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW*.**

Dear Jennifer,

Thank you for meeting with me yesterday to discuss your experiences working for the Security and Exchange Commission’s Chicago office. I am very appreciative of your time as I know you were only in Milwaukee for two days and had many other commitments.

#### **What this paragraph does effectively:**

- It recalls the time and place of the meeting.
- It clarifies that you met to discuss the attorney’s experiences in the SEC.
- It makes a statement specific to the attorney’s schedule indicating this is not a generic letter.
- Use of “Jennifer” in the salutation is only appropriate if the tone of the meeting indicates that it be.

## Dissecting a Thank You Letter—PARAGRAPH 2: The Sales Pitch

The specific role of the second paragraph is contingent on the nature of the meeting, but without exception, this paragraph is vital to making a positive impression.

In paragraph 2, your task is to market yourself to the recipient as the candidate who should receive the job offer, or in the case of an informational interview, the individual who is worthy of a contact's name, a recommendation, or a mentor.

In response to a **JOB INTERVIEW**, the second paragraph should:

- **Enhance your candidacy by reaffirming your interest in and enthusiasm for the employer and reiterating fit.**

Content of the second paragraph may also include:

- Information in addition to that provided during the interview that further enhances your candidacy.
- Discussion of a point with which you were displeased with your response during the interview.
- A relevant change in your candidacy that occurred subsequent to the interview (*e.g.*, CALI award in a class, article accepted for publication).

In response to an **INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW**, the second paragraph serves to demonstrate that you value the information shared by the attorney/professional with whom you met and to reaffirm that you are worthy of their assistance as you continue with your job search.

Always be aware that the tone of your correspondence should reflect the tone of your meeting. ■

### EXAMPLE 2<sup>nd</sup> PARAGRAPH: THANK YOU FOLLOWING A *JOB INTERVIEW*

As we focused our conversation on our mutual experiences with law school classes and professors, I was remiss in not mentioning that in Spring 2022, I will be interning with the Milwaukee Teacher's Union to review how the proposed legislative changes to state-mandated student testing would impact district curriculum. I know that your strategic plan specifically includes expanding representation of teacher unions, and I feel as though my internship situates me well to understand a current issue of debate. I also want to reiterate my interest in joining Beyer & Holder. From what I learned during the interview, the firm offers opportunities for which I am looking and an environment where my prior experiences and legal skills could benefit clients.

#### What this paragraph does effectively:

- It establishes an interest in the firm that is specific to the known needs of the employer as they were revealed during the interview.
- It establishes how the student could add specific value to the firm and its clients.
- It highlights a strength of the candidate which was not discussed during the interview that adds to the candidate's qualifications.
- It is specific in references to the interview and the employer so that the recipient would not feel as though they received a recycled letter.

### EXAMPLE 2<sup>nd</sup> PARAGRAPH: THANK YOU FOLLOWING AN *INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW*

Your suggestions regarding course selections and internships that you feel would permit me to make a more compelling statement as to my sincere interest in securities work are certain to benefit my job search and my professional development. Prior to our meeting, I was unaware that the SEC had a summer honors program for second-year law students. I fully intend to research this program in detail and apply next fall. Thank you for offering to review my application when the time arrives for me to submit it. I value your input and will definitely forward to you my completed application. I also appreciate your honesty with respect to the fact that if I hope to secure employment with the SEC, I will need to expand my search to include all of the regional offices.

#### What this paragraph does effectively:

- The paragraph establishes that you value the information the attorney provided and intend to act on her suggestions.
- It also establishes that you are an individual who takes advantage of opportunities and follows through, which will permit the attorney to feel comfortable assisting you in the future.

\* If you finish reading the above examples and think, "That doesn't help me because that isn't at all like my experience," you should know that this is what makes these examples solid. There is NO FORM LETTER. Each interview experience is unique, and you need to construct correspondence reflective of this fact.

## Dissecting a Thank You Letter—PARAGRAPH 3: The Logistics

Paragraph three provides an opportunity to do the following:

- Reiterate your gratitude for the individual's time, and if a job interview, consideration of your candidacy.
- Clarify the next step for you and/or the recipient (*e.g.*, in response to an informational meeting, you may indicate that you are going to contact him next semester to provide an update on your progress in law school; in response to a job interview, you may indicate you look forward to hearing from the recipient).
- Note that you are enclosing materials (*e.g.*, transcripts, writing sample, references) requested during your interview.

### CLOSING

Your closing should be professional but should also reflect the tone of the meeting. In response to a job interview, "Sincerely," and "Thank you," are most appropriate. ■

### EXAMPLE 3<sup>rd</sup> PARAGRAPH: THANK YOU FOLLOWING *A JOB INTERVIEW*.

I attached a copy of my writing sample as you asked that I do and an updated résumé that reflects my spring 2022 internship. If I can provide any additional information that will assist you in evaluating me as a candidate, please contact me at the above listed telephone number or email address. I am very excited about this opportunity.

Sincerely,

#### What this paragraph does effectively:

- It notes the additional documents being sent, restates gratitude, invites the reader to contact the student if information is needed and indicates that the student will wait to hear from the employer.

### EXAMPLE 3<sup>rd</sup> PARAGRAPH: THANK YOU FOLLOWING *AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW*.

Thank you again for meeting with me. I look forward to updating you in the spring regarding my law school classes and job search, and I will call you if I travel to Chicago in February for the Midwest Public Interest Law Career Conference.

Warm regards,

#### What this paragraph does effectively:

- This paragraph thanks the reader for her time. It also reminds the reader that she welcomed future contact initiated by the student.

## Length & Format & Timing & Editing

### LENGTH

A single page is standard. The letter should consist of no more than three, at most four, paragraphs.

### FORMAT

When writing thank you letters, you have three formatting options: (1) block; (2) modified-block; and (3) semi-block.

The most common layout of a business letter is known as block format. Using this format, the entire letter, with the exception of your letterhead, is left justified and single spaced except for a double space between paragraphs.

Modified block is another common format. This format has the body of the letter is left justified and single-spaced,

and the date and closing are in alignment starting at center of the page.

The final, and least used, style is semi-block. It is modified block style except that each paragraph is indented instead of left justified.

Your formal letter should include the professional letterhead you use on your résumé and cover letters.

### TIMING

Your goal is to send your thank you correspondence within a reasonable timeframe after the interview. The goal is 1-2 days when you can achieve this with a high-quality letter. Don't rush to get the letter out only to kill your candidacy with poor execution.

Employers who are actively engaged in recruitment, especially those participating in the fall recruitment program, are often prepared to make speedy decisions regarding hiring. If your thank you letters are to serve as part of your candidacy, they need to be timely and well written. Moreover, quick turn around on the thank you implies your enthusiasm for the position.

### EDITING

It should go without saying that the thank you letter serves as yet another sample of your writing skills. The document must be articulate and clean. ■

## *So Many Attorneys, So Little Time: To Whom Should You Send a Thank You Letter?*

Send thank you letters **to each individual** with whom you interview.

The shortcut is to direct a single letter to the attorney who led the panel of interviewers, to the attorney who you perceive or know to be the decision maker, to the attorney with whom you believe you established the best rapport, or to the recruiting coordinator.

When opting for the shortcut, it's common to request that the recipient "please extend my appreciation to the other members of the panel/your colleagues, with whom I met during my visit to your firm."

The likelihood that the recipient of the letter will actually forward your note of thanks or mention to the other individuals that you sent a thank you letter is unknown, and therein lies the risk.

If your letter/note isn't shared, several attorneys may question your professionalism and interest in the position. This is a great way to sabotage an otherwise solid performance.

We understand that at some legal employers you will meet with upwards of 8-10 attorneys in a single day. We understand that you have competing demands on your time, including but not

limited to, preparing for classes, completing cite checks for journals, attending other interviews, and working at your current internship. But we also know that the legal job market is competitive, and you need to distinguish yourself in as many positive ways as possible.

Sending a well-written thank you to each attorney with whom you meet in the course of an interview process is important to your job search success. ■

## *Recycling a Thank You When Interviewed by a Panel*

The previous pages of this Guide make clear that each thank you must be tailored to uniquely reflect each specific meeting/interview experience. This is true and without exception.

What is not true is that you have to reinvent the wheel when drafting thank you letters to individuals who were part of a panel. There is a difference between replicating portions of a thank you targeted to attorneys that were part of a

panel of interviewers and a generic letter. The ways in which you can effectively express gratitude and characterize a single interview experience are finite.

In the situation where you are interviewed by more than one attorney at a time, the conversation you have is likely universal to all those in attendance.

Certainly, diversify the letters to the degree that you can. If one of the inter-

viewers had a connection to you that the others did not, address it in the thank you. If one of the attorneys seemed interested in a particular experience on your résumé, you should reference it. Otherwise the thank you letters are going to be somewhat similar.

When you meet with several attorneys from the same employer and the meetings are individual, the substance of the letters to each attorney should be different. ■

## *Computer vs. Pen*

Professional opinions vary as to whether a word processed letter on bond paper that is mailed, a word processed business letter that is saved as a PDF and attached to an email or a handwritten note on a professional card/stationary is more appropriate.

The context and tone of the interview, the perceived formality of the interviewer, and legal market may all dictate to some degree which approach you take.

In formal job interviews where your relationship to the firm and with the interviewers remains long-armed, we recommend formatting your thank you as a formal business letter. One option is to send U.S. Mail, but it is becoming

more accepted to attach the business letter thank you as a PDF and send as an email attachment. If you print and mail your letter, the paper and appearance should match that of your cover letter. If you send an email, the content of the email should be a concise statement that the thank you is attached as a PDF.

Some interviews, especially with smaller employers in small communities, involve several meetings with the same attorney/attorneys and become more personal. Smaller firms and public interest organizations are typically committed to getting to know you and possibly your partner, so they are certain to extend an offer to someone who is interested in establishing themselves long-term with the

employer and the community. While a business letter thank you would be sent after the initial meeting, a handwritten thank you may be more appropriate after the second or third meeting.

**Informational interviews** tend to be more personal than job interviews and therefore often support a handwritten note of thanks. Even in this context, however, the tone of the discussion will dictate written versus word processed.

Location matters, too. Areas of the country have different norms for what is considered appropriate when it comes to thank yous. Thank yous are important and the manner in which they are sent should be considered. ■

## Screening Interviews: Unique Circumstances

You may—in the unique circumstances of a screening interview—send your thank you via email with the content of the actual email serving as the thank you itself.

A screening interview usually is specific to the employers who recruit on campus or at job fairs. Screening interviews typically are 20 or 30 minutes in length and exist to narrow the pool of candidates that will be offered full interviews at the employer's place of business.

The value of the email in this context is its immediacy. Screening interview decisions are made quickly.

An emailed thank you is really only effective if it follows the interview closely. Emailing a thank you 10 days after the interview undercuts the point of the email, and you then may want to stick to traditional delivery via U.S. Mail.

What is more important than the quick turnaround, though, is that your thank you is well written and error-free. Better to get the letter out a day or two

later to ensure quality than to rush an email.

In circumstances other than screening interviews, thank yous should be written in business letter format, printed on quality paper and sent via U.S. Mail, be attached as PDF documents to an email, or be handwritten on a notecard and sent via U.S. Mail.

## A Sample Thank You Following a Screening Interview (via email)

The thank you letter to the right is an example of a correspondence that would be sent after a **screening (first) interview** via email.

Note the formality of the format and content of the letter. The letter is authored as if it could be printed and submitted on bond paper via US Mail.

You should provide your telephone and email address below your name as the email correspondence does not have the benefit of a professional letterhead including this information.

Also, make certain you create a subject line that identifies clearly the e-mail's content, *e.g.*, "Thank you for meeting."

Finally, anytime you email an employer, make certain you are using an email account with a professional moniker. If you do decide to use a personal account, your email address should be your first and last name so that the employer can easily identify you as the sender. ■

Dear Attorney Chudgar:

I thoroughly enjoyed our conversation on Friday, March 25, at Marquette University Law School. I appreciate the insight you provided regarding your experiences as a former Taylor & Schmidt summer associate. Like you, I find it appealing that the firm's summer associates are offered the opportunity to explore several practice areas.

Thank you also for taking the time to answer candidly the questions I had regarding Taylor & Schmidt's summer program and its philosophies regarding new associate training. As described by you, I feel strongly that the firm offers an environment where I can excel. Moreover, as we discussed, I am confident that my prior work experience at H&R Block and my interest in tax law position me well to fill the firm's projected need for a new lawyer on its corporate tax team.

If I can provide additional information or answer any other questions, please contact me as I would welcome the opportunity to join the firm in summer 2022.

Sincerely,

Amy Shields

414.288.6397  
amy.shields@marquette.edu